

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** August 29, 2016 8:30 AM Conference Call

**Agenda Item:** Bighorn Sheep Hunt Tendoy Mountains HD 315

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 20 Minutes

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**Background:** FWP is proposing bighorn sheep hunt in the Tendoy Mountains (HD 315) to help eliminate the remaining approximately 12 sheep (9 ewes and 3 adult rams) of the existing diseased herd so that healthy bighorns can be reintroduced. This follows a hunt in 2015 and nine months of FWP effort to eliminate the entire herd.

In 2015 the Commission accepted FWP's Decision Notice on an Environmental Assessment to depopulate the chronically low-performing Tendoy Mountains bighorn sheep herd, in which disease has become endemic resulting in too few lambs surviving to sustain the population, and restock the area with healthy bighorns. The depopulation phase of the project began in September 2015 with a public hunt.

For this current hunt proposal, after sufficient media outreach so that people are aware, and because of the short timeline, the Commission will entertain the proposal, accept public comment, and make a final decision during a conference call. The public will be able to comment during the call from any Regional office.

We propose to sell over-the-counter licenses for 3 days because we would like fewer hunters afield than last year, and to begin the hunt on September 15 with the traditional opening of rifle season for bighorn sheep. The media coverage would let people know about the opportunity and the difficulty of the hunt so as to set up realistic expectations. As with the 2015 hunt, FWP would send out letters to hunters purchasing licenses explaining the purpose and regulations of the hunt.

During the 2015 hunt period there were 24 sheep taken, which included a wounding loss and an illegal kill. Following the public hunting effort we thought FWP would be able to take any remaining sheep by helicopter gunning or hunting from the ground, so no public hunt was proposed earlier. However, since the end of the 2015 hunting season five attempts by helicopter and over 20 days of hunting from the ground by three to four experienced hunters have only been able to take four additional sheep. Therefore, we would like to again have a public hunt, albeit with fewer hunters than the 311 licenses sold in 2015.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** The Tendoy Mountains Depopulation/Restocking Project was fully vetted through an Environmental Assessment. The public is aware of the overall project. Media outreach specifically for the proposed 2016 hunt began August 23. Public comment will be taken during the conference call.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Not having a hunt in 2016 would mean that it will take longer to eliminate the existing diseased herd of bighorns and consequently delay reintroduction of healthy sheep.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends that the Commission adopt the proposed Hunting District 315 (Tendoy Mountains) bighorn sheep hunt for the 2016 season.

**Proposed Motion:** I move that the Commission adopt Hunting District 315 (Tendoy Mountains) bighorn sheep hunt for the 2016 season as proposed by FWP.